

Cap'n Warren's Wards



by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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CAP'N WARREN'S ARRIVAL IN NEW YORK CAUSES SOME CONSTERNATION

Atwood Graves, New York lawyer, goes to South Denboro, Cape Cod, to see Captain Elisha Warren. Caught in a terrific storm while on the way, he meets Cap'n Warren by accident and goes with the latter to his home. The lawyer informs Cap'n Warren that his brother, whom he had not seen for eighteen years, has died and named him as guardian of his two children, Caroline aged twenty, and Stephen, aged nineteen. The captain tells Graves he will go to New York and look over the situation before deciding whether he will accept the trust.

CHAPTER III.

The New York Warrens.

"It's a box of a place, though, isn't it?" declared Mr. Stephen Warren, contemptuously glancing about the library of the apartment. "A box, by George! I think it's a blooming shame that we have to put up with it, sis."

Mr. Warren sprawled in the most comfortable chair in the room, was looking out through the window, across the wind swept width of Central Park West, over the knolls and valleys of the park itself, now bare of foliage and sprinkled with patches of snow.

His sister, Caroline, sat opposite to him, also looking out at the December landscape. She, too, was discontented and unhappy, though she tried not to show it.

"I maintain that we don't have to live like this," Steve went on. "We aren't paupers, even though father wasn't so well fixed as every one thought. With management and care we could have stayed in the old house, I believe, and kept up appearances, at least. What's the use of advertising that we're broke?"

"But, Steve, you know Mr. Graves said—"

"Oh, yes, I know! You swallowed every word Graves said, Caro, as if he was the whole book of Proverbs. By George, I don't; I'm from Missouri!"

Mr. Warren, being in the sophomore class at Yale, was of the age when one is constitutionally "from Missouri." Probably King Solomon at sixty had doubts concerning the scope and depth of his wisdom; at eighteen he would have admitted its all embracing infallibility without a blush.

"I tell you," continued Stephen, "there's no sense in it, sis. You and I know plenty of people whose incomes are no larger than ours. Do they economize, as Graves is continually preaching? They do not, publicly at least."

"Yes, but every one knows they are—bluffing, as you call it."

"What of it? They don't really know; they only suspect. And I met Jim Blaisdell yesterday, and he shook my hand after I had held it in front of his eyes where he couldn't help seeing it and had the nerve to tell me he hoped things weren't as bad with us as he had heard."

"I never liked the Blaisdells," declared Caroline indignantly. "Mrs. Corcoran Dunn told me that every one was talking about them and wondering how long they could keep it up. And the newspapers have been printing all sorts of things and hinting that



"What's the use of advertising that we are broke?"

young Mr. Blaisdell's appointment as director after his father wrecked the bank was a scandal. At least, we haven't that to bear up under. Father was honest, if he wasn't rich."

"What makes me feel the worst about all this is that Stock Exchange seat of father's. If I were only of age, so that I could go down there on the floor, I tell you it wouldn't be long before you and I were back where we belong, sis. But, no; I'm a kid, so Graves thinks, in charge of a guardian—a guardian, by gad!"

He snorted in manly indignation. Caroline, her pretty face troubled, rose and walked slowly across the room.

"Oh, dear," sighed the girl; "I do hope Mr. Graves will be well enough to call today. He expected to. Except for the telephone message telling us that that man at Denboro—"

"Our dear Uncle Elisha," put in Stephen, with sarcasm. "Uncle 'Lish'! Heavens, what a name!"

"Hush! He can't help his name. And father's was worse yet—Abijah. Think of it!"

"I don't want to think of it. Neither did the governor. That's why he dropped it, I suppose. Just what did Graves say? Give me his exact words."

"His partner, Mr. Kuhn, telephoned that everything was satisfactory. This Captain Warren—a ship captain, I suppose he is—would in all probability refuse to accept the guardianship and the rest of it!"

"Refuse? I should think so. I'm just as certain father was insane when he made that will as I am that I'm alive. If he wasn't, do you suppose he would have put us and the estate in the care of a down east Jay? It's inconceivable! It's ridiculous! Think of it! Suppose this uncle of ours had accepted. Suppose he had come to town here and any of our friends had met him. This is our guardian, Captain Warren of Punkin Centre."

"Pleased to meet ye," says Uncle Lish. "How's taters? Horrors! Say, Caro, you haven't told any one, Malcolm or his mother or any one, have you?"

"Of course not, Steve. You know I wouldn't."

"Well, don't. They needn't know it, now or at any other time. Graves will probably get himself appointed, and he's respectable if he is an old fogey. We'll worry along till I'm twenty-one, and then—well, then I'll handle our business myself."

He was on his way to the telephone when the doorbell buzzed.

"Gad, there's Graves now!" he exclaimed. "Now I suppose I'll have to stay. We'll hear about dear Uncle Lish, won't we? Oh, joy!"

But the staid butler when he entered the library did not announce the lawyer's name.

"Mrs. Corcoran Dunn and Mr. Malcolm," he said. "Will you see them, Miss Caroline?"

The young lady's face lit up. "Certainly, Edwards," she said. "Show them—oh, Mrs. Dunn, I'm so glad to see you! It was ever so good of you to come. And Malcolm."

"My dear child," she cried, "how could I stay away? We have spoken of you and Stephen so often this morning. We know how lonely you must be, and Malcolm and I decided we must run in on you after lunch. Didn't we, Malcolm?"

Malcolm Corcoran Dunn, her son, was a blond young man with a rather indolent manner.

"Sure, mater," he said calmly. "How'd ye do, Caroline? 'Lo, Steve!" The quartet shook hands. Mrs. Dunn sank creakingly into a chair and gazed about the room.

"My dear," said Mrs. Dunn, addressing Caroline, "how are you getting on? How are your nerves? Is all the dreadful 'settling' over?"

"Very nearly, thank goodness!"

"That's a mercy. I should certainly have been here yesterday to help you in superintending and arranging and so on, but I was suffering from one of my 'hearties,' and you know what they are."

Her son turned from the window. "I say, mother," he declared wearily, "I do wish you wouldn't speak of your vital organs in the plural. Any one would imagine you were a sort of freak, like the two headed boy at the circus. It's positively distressing."

Stephen laughed. He admired young Dunn immensely. Mrs. Dunn sighed. "Don't, Malcolm, dear," she pleaded. "You sound so unfeeling. One not acquainted with your real kindness of heart—"

"Oh, drop it," interrupted Malcolm. "Let's omit the heart interest. This isn't a clinic. I say, Steve, how do you like the new flat? It is a flat, isn't it?"

Stephen turned red. His sister colored and bit her lip. Mrs. Dunn hastened to the rescue.

"Horrors!" she exclaimed. "Malcolm, you really are insufferable. Flat! Caroline, dear, you mustn't mind him."

He will have his joke. Malcolm, apologize!"

The command was sharp, and her son obeyed it.

"Caroline is tired out, I'm sure," said Mrs. Dunn. "A little fresh air will do her good. I was going to suggest that Malcolm and she and Stephen go for a short ride. Our car is at the door, it's not at all a bad afternoon and the outing will be just what you need."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dunn," said Caroline gratefully. "I should like to. Indeed, I should. But we have been expecting a business call from Mr. Graves, father's lawyer, and—"

"Oh, come on, sis!" interrupted Stephen. "I'm dying to get out of this jail. Let old Graves wait if he comes. We won't be long, and, besides, it's not certain that he is coming today. Come on!"

"I'm afraid I ought not, Steve. Mr. Graves may come and—and it seems too bad to trouble our friends—"

"It's not trouble, it's pleasure," urged Mrs. Dunn. "Malcolm will be delighted. It was his idea."

When Caroline and her brother had gone for their wraps Mrs. Dunn laid a hand on her son's arm.

"Now mind," she whispered, "see if you can find out anything during the ride. Something more explicit about the size of their estate and who the guardian is to be. There are all sorts of stories, you know, and we must learn the truth very soon. Don't appear curious, but merely friendly. You understand?"

"Sure, mater," was the careless reply. "I'll pump."

The two departed, leaving their lady visitor ensconced in the comfortable chair. She remained in it for perhaps five minutes. Then she rose and sauntered about the room.

Her reverie was interrupted by voices in the passage. She listened, but could hear nothing understandable. Evidently the butler was having an argument with some one. It could not be Graves.

Edwards reappeared, looking troubled.

"It's a—gentleman to see Miss Caroline," he said. "He won't give his name, ma'am, but says she's expecting him."

"What sort of a person is he, Edwards?"

The butler's face twitched for an instant with a troubled smile; then it resumed its customary respectful calm.

"I hardly know, ma'am. He's an oldish man. He—I think he's from the country."

From behind him came a quiet chuckle.

"You're right, commodore," said a man's voice; "I'm from the country. You guessed it."

Edwards jumped, started out of his respectable wits. Mrs. Dunn rose indignantly from her chair.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said the intruder, appearing in the doorway. "You mustn't think I'm forcin' my way where I ain't wanted. But it seemed to take so long to make the admiral here understand that I was gadin' to wait until Caroline came back that I thought I'd save time and breath by provin' it to him. I didn't know there was any company. Excuse me, ma'am. I won't bother you. I'll just come to anchor out here in the entry. Don't mind me."

"Why," Mrs. Dunn exclaimed in an alarmed whisper—"why, I never heard of such brazen impudence in my life. He must be insane. He is a lunatic, isn't he, Edwards?"

The butler shook his head. "I—I don't know, ma'am," he stammered.

"I believe he is," Mrs. Dunn's presence of mind was returning and with it her courage. Her florid cheeks flamed a more vivid red, and her eyes snapped. "But, whether he is or not, he shan't bulldoze me."

She strode majestically to the door. The visitor was seated in the hall, calmly reading a newspaper. Hat and suit case were on the floor beside him.

"What do you mean by this?" demanded the lady. "Who are you? If you have any business here state it at once."

The man glanced at her over his spectacles, rose and stood looking down at her. His expression was pleasant, and he was remarkably cool.

"Yes, ma'am," he said gravely. "I'll be glad to tell you who I am if you'd like to have me. I haven't made any mistake, have I? I understood your steward—the feller with the brass buttons—to say that Abijah Warren's children lived here. That's so, ain't it? If not, then I am mistaken."

Mrs. Dunn regarded him with indignation. "You are," she said coldly. "The family of the late Mr. Rodgers Warren lives here. I presume the slight resemblance in names misled you. Edwards, show the gentleman out."

"Just one moment more, ma'am. It was Rodgers Warren's children I was lookin' for. A Rodgers Warren he called himself, didn't he? Yes, well, the A stood for Abijah; that was his Christian name. And he left two children, Caroline and Stephen? Good! I thought for a jiffy I'd blundered in where I had no business, but it's all right you see, ma'am, I'm their uncle from South Denboro, Mass. My name is Elisha Warren."

Mrs. Dunn gasped, Edwards, peering over her shoulder, breathed heavily.

"You are—their uncle?" repeated the lady.

"Yes, ma'am. I'm Bije's brother. Oh, don't worry; it's all right. And don't fret yourself about me either. I'll set right down out here and read my paper and wait till Caroline or Stephen get home. They're expectin' me. Mr. Graves, the lawyer, told 'em I was comin'."

He calmly seated himself and adjusted his spectacles. Mrs. Dunn stepped back into the library and walked to the window. She beckoned with

an agitated finger to the butler, who joined her.

"Edwards," she whispered, "did you hear what he said? Is it true?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"Did Mr. Warren have a brother?"

"I didn't know that he had, ma'am."

"Do you—do you think it likely that he would have a brother like—like that?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"Was Miss Caroline expecting him?"

"I don't know, ma'am. She—"

"Oh, you don't know anything! You're impossible. Go away!"

"Yes, ma'am," said Edwards thankfully, and went.

Mrs. Corcoran Dunn stood for some minutes by the window, thinking, or trying to think, a way to the truth of this astounding development. Finally she creakingly crossed the room and spoke.

"Mr. Warren," she said, "I feel guilty in keeping you out there. Won't you come in to the library?"

"Why, thank you, ma'am, I'm all right. Don't trouble about me. Go right on with your readin' or sewin' or knittin' or whatever you was doin' and—"

"So you are the late Mr. Warren's brother?" asked the lady, making her first lead in the game.

"Yes, ma'am. His older brother. Bije was ten years younger'n I am, Mrs.—er—"

"Dunn. I am an old friend of the family."

"That's good. I'm glad to hear they've got friends. When you're in



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sickness or trouble or sorer, friendship counts for consider'ble. How are the young folks—Caroline and Stephen—pretty smart, hey?"

"Smart? Why, they are intelligent, naturally. I—"

"No, no. I mean are they pretty well?"

"Very well, indeed, considering the shock of their recent bereavement."

"Yes, yes. Of course. And they're moved, too. Movin' an awful job. They say three movin's are as bad as a fire, but I callate I'd rather burn up a set of carpets than pull 'em up, 'specially if they was insured. 'Tain't half so much strain on your religion. I remember the last time we took up our carpets at home, Abbie—she's my second cousin, keepin' house for me—said if gettin' down on my knees has that effect on me she'd never ask me to go to prayer meetin' again. Ho, ho!"

He chuckled. Mrs. Dunn elevated her nose and looked out of the window. Then she led another small trump.

"You say that Miss Caroline and her brother expect you," she said. "You surprise me. Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; I'm sure. When Mr. Graves came down to see me, last week 'twas, I told him to say I'd be up pretty soon to look the ground over. This is a pretty fine place the young folks have got here," he added, gazing admiringly at the paintings and book-cases.

"Yes," assented the lady condescendingly. "For an apartment it is really quite livable."

"Mr. Graves came to see you at your home, did he?"

"Yes, ma'am; at South Denboro. And he certainly did have a rough passage. Ho, ho! Probably you heard about it, bein' so friendly with the family."

"Ahem! Doubtless he would have mentioned it, but he has been ill. I hope Mr. Graves' errand was successful."

"Well, sort of so so."

"Yes. He came to see you in connection with your brother's estate—some legacy perhaps?"

She did not look at the captain when she asked this question. Therefore she did not notice the glance which he gave her.

"Um-hm. Somethin' of that kind, Mrs. Dunn. I can't help thinkin'," he went on, "how nice it is that Caroline and Steve have such a good friend as you to help 'em. Your husband and Bije was chums, I s'pose?"

"No, not exactly. The friendship was on my side of the family."

Cap'n Warren gets a cold reception from his young wards, but in spite of this he announces that he will stay with them for a few days.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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